Real Imagined Communities: National Narratives and the Globalization of Design History
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Figure 1
Toyota Camry Hybrid Drive yellow cab in New York City. Photograph by Kjetil Fallan, February 2015.

Design is simultaneously global, regional, national, and local, and it has been so for centuries, throughout the early and late modern periods.[1] The Silk Road and the transatlantic slave trade are examples of the pre-modern and early modern globalization of commerce; in this respect, they can be associated with the development of similarly global channels of communication about goods and their design and manufacture. Today, the cars we celebrate as "Italian" could just as well be designed by Britons and Brazilians and manufactured in Poland and Pakistan, on behalf of multinational owners, for markets in Switzerland and Swaziland.[2] A pertinent example of the hybridization of design identities today is that one of the most common New York City yellow cabs—an iconic mainstay of American design culture—now is a Japanese car, the Toyota Camry, in the Hybrid Drive version (see Figure 1).

Although design might be more global than ever before, it is still conditioned by, and in turn informs, its global, regional, national, and local contexts at once. Technological developments, including the web, digital cloud services, and CAD-CAM, enable collaboration between automotive designers working anywhere from Delhi and Detroit to Dubai. However well-traveled the designers themselves might be, they operate from within physical contexts in which local, regional, national, and international factors are active.

1   Anna Calvera, "Local, Regional, National, Global and Feedback: Several Issues to Be Faced with Constructing Regional Narratives," *Journal of Design History* 18, no. 4 (2005): 371–83.

2   Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei, "Introduction: The History of Italian Design," in *Made in Italy: Rethinking a Century of Italian Design,* eds. Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1.

The long process of globalization has been accompanied by discourses that have emphasized certain geo-cultural contexts over others at various times. Although the national category has been a dominant one for understanding culture and identity—as well as politics and economics and a host of other factors—for the past two centuries and more, mainstream media and academic discourses alike have been preoccupied with globalization in our own century.[3] Across the humanities and social sciences, international developments in higher education, the continuing influence of postcolonial theory, and the contemporary focus on sustainability have all exerted an influence on the ways in which design, particularly, is understood. Design historians have critiqued an existing bias in the field toward Western industrialized nations that is based on a definition of design derived from its separation from industrial manufacture. They (we) are now looking further afield in writing *Global Design History,* to use the title of a 2011 anthology.[4] In this work, national histories have been criticized as unsuited to a new global gaze in which contemporary society and historical narratives are to be freed from the geopolitical straightjacket of nation states.[5] Arjun Appadurai has even claimed that the nation state has become obsolete as a marker of identity construction.[6] Is the nation simply *imagined,* a modern myth, as Ernest Gellner claimed?[7] Or can this admittedly complex construction still be a valuable framework for histories of design?

The nation state is no longer the only socio-cultural or political-economic unit forming our identities and experiences, if it ever was, although national and regional histories of design have demonstrated cogent frameworks for the discussion of common socio-economic, cultural, and identity issues. In the context of celebrations and moral panic alike about the effect of globalization, recognizing that the much-vaunted global chains of design, manufacturing, and commerce are still composed of national endeavors is critical. This article argues for a reinsertion of the national category into contemporary academic understanding of design—both past and present. It provides a timely examination of the historiographic and methodological value of national frameworks in writing design history. We begin by examining how the dominant national paradigm ceded to the global as an academic, and mainstream, preoccupation, and then reintroduce the national into the global in design history.

The Nation and History Writing

The nation and the national have formed perhaps the most widespread and long-lasting paradigm in historical scholarship from its origins as an academic discipline in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth century.[8] Umut Özkirimli's sound historiographic survey of writing on nations sees its origins in a

3   Richard P. Applebaum and William I. Robinson, eds., *Critical Globalization Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

4   Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello, and Sarah Teasley, eds., *Global Design History* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

5   Jilly Traganou, "From Nation-Bound Histories to Global Narratives of Architecture," in *Global Design History,* eds. Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello, and Sarah Teasley (New York: Routledge, 2005), 166.

6   Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 169.

7   Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

8   Stefan Berger, "A Return to the National Paradigm? National History Writing in Germany, Italy, France and Britain from 1945 to the Present," *Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 3 (2005): 631.

"primordial" understanding of the nation as a natural entity.[9] Primordial nationalism is supported by a feeling of belonging and emotional iterations of national identity, such as patriotism. The continued dominance of the nation as a category of understanding seems to support the idea that many people accept the nation as, if not natural, then somehow inevitable. Terms such as motherland, fatherland, and homeland merge kinship and territory and underscore a "sociobiological" understanding of nationhood in which the heritage and temporal depth of a nation are macros that correlate with the successive generations of a family.[10]

Only with the widespread influence of poststructuralist theory on the historical profession from the 1980s onward was the primacy of the national as narrative and framework for understanding seriously challenged. Across the humanities and social sciences, this challenge took the form of a renewed interest in the national—not as a given or a convenient unit of analysis, but as a constructed entity. Scholarship on the nation focused on deconstructing its symbolic and representational aspects.[11] Özkirimli groups three of the key writers on nations—Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm—as "modernists" who sought to dismantle the idea of the nation as natural or inevitable and instead revealed nations as constructs—as the result of concerted engagements in the invention of tradition and imagined communities, albeit with a regrettable emphasis on high culture and public discourses and practices rather than on everyday or demotic instances of the national.[12] The undeniably influential theories of national identity proposed by Gellner, Anderson, Hobsbawm, and others have been critiqued most notably by Tim Edensor for being too singularly focused on "high" culture, ceremonial practices, state interventions, and official life. What is missing from their accounts, he claims, "is a sense of the unspectacular, contemporary production of national identity through popular culture and everyday life."[13] This oversight has significant implications for recognizing the importance of design in communicating national identity, as we shall see.

Özkirimli then turns to ethnosymbolist approaches to the nation, including Anthony D. Smith's examination of the nation and ethnicities, before arriving at "new" approaches to nationalism, characterized by the work of five theorists informed variously by postcolonial and feminist theory.[14] These theorists include, notably for the study of design understood as a demotic phenomenon, Michael Billig's work on "banal nationalism."[15] Özkirimli adduces from his survey a synthetic approach that takes the best from the literature across the categories he reviews and arrives at an understanding of the national as "neither illusory nor artificial, but [...] socially constituted and institutional, hence 'real' in its consequences and a very 'real' part of our everyday lives."[16] He closes his

9   Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

10 Steven Grosby, *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 43, 11.

11 Berger, "A Return to the National Paradigm?" 650–60.

12 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Anderson, *Imagined Communities;* Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism.*

13 Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002), 12.

14 See Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann, Catherine Hall, eds., *Gendered Nations: Nationalism and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000).

15 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

16 Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism,* 217.

book with a call for greater collaboration between theorists of nationalism and historians, the former all too often operating in an abstract mode with insufficient reference to specific empirical examples and the latter ignoring theoretical developments in favor of "descriptive narratives of particular nationalisms."[17]

Postcolonialism and the Nation

In addition to poststructuralist approaches to understanding nations, and the detractors of these approaches, work informed by postcolonial theory provides critical perspectives. Because the modern nation state is a recent construct, and one that was transposed and translated to the non-Western world as part of, and in the wake of, colonialism, its role in historical narratives has preoccupied postcolonialist historiography. For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that "European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes a task of exploring how this thought—which is now everybody's heritage and affects us all—may be renewed from and for the margins."[18] The histories of modern non-Western nations are better understood by reading the reception and reinterpretation in these societies of colonial thought than by discarding it. The latter would amount to "postcolonial revenge," a less productive strategy.[19]

Crucially, however, postcolonial theory has also led to a renewal—and improvement—of the national paradigm in historiography. A key example is Partha Chatterjee's critique of Benedict Anderson's claim that colonial nationalism was inevitably based on European models. Chatterjee argues that this misconception is caused when historians prioritize the political realms of society over the cultural, and that a cultural history of colonial nations reveals the emergence of modern national cultures independent of, or at least parallel to, the Western-dominated colonial state.[20] Similarly, and again based on examples from the history of the previously colonized world, Chatterjee dismisses as premature Appadurai's call to move beyond the nation.[21] He argues instead for increased attention to historical processes that are "located on a different site—not the moral-cultural ground of modernity and the external institutional domain of global civil society but rather the ground of democracy and the internal domain of national political society."[22] Also noteworthy is that national narratives in non-Western societies, such as India and China, by far predate the modern Western nation state and its historiography.[23]

Taking Fernando Ortiz's notion of transculturation as his example, Walter Mignolo has even critiqued postcolonial perspectives for their reliance on the national framework: "You find either a nation-state that becomes an empire (like Spain or England) or one undergoing uprisings and rebellions to become autonomous,

17 Ibid., 219.

18 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.

19 Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: An Introduction* (Sydney: Allan and Unwin, 1998), x.

20 Partha Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 23–36.

21 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 158–177.

22 Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation,* 176.

23 Daniel Woolf, "Of Nations, Nationalism and National Identity: Reflections on the Historiographical Organization of the Past," in *The Many Faces of Clio: Cross-Cultural Approaches to Historiography. Festschrift for George G. Iggers,* eds. Q. Edward Wang and Franz L. Fillafer (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 71–103.

working toward the foundation of a nation."[24] In an effort to move beyond such dichotomies, however, Samer Akkach has recently suggested that the marginalization of the colonized world is as much a product of postcolonialism as of colonialism. He argues that the process of marginalization and separatism, at least in the case of the Arab world, "coincided with the self-conscious desire of the Arabs to disentangle themselves from the colonisers' history, the history of the West, and to rewrite their independent national history and reconstruct their cultural identity."[25]

From Nation to Nation: Alternative Approaches

Different scalar foci have been tested, most notably by the French *Annales* School, who advocated the longue duree as more revealing than studies of shorter periods of time.[26] Meanwhile, fields such as social history, history of everyday life, and micro history have tended to focus on other units of analysis—for example, the family, the village, and the region.

More recent alternatives to the national paradigm have included comparative history and transnational history. For example, of relevance to design history is Greg Castillo's examination of the significance of homes during the Cold War as demonstrations of the relative merits of socialist and capitalist societies and associated lifestyles.[27] Castillo ranges comparatively across East and West, the Soviet bloc and the United States, in tracing this argument through the material culture of the competing regimes and the discourses that surrounded it. Design historians also have much to gain from considering the work of the major "Tensions of Europe" project and the associated Making Europe book series— just one outcome of which is the examination by Ruth Oldenziel and Mikael Hård of debates surrounding the various technological developments that were adopted by consumers across Europe from 1850 to the present.[28] This work is extremely valuable for elucidating and exemplifying the place of design and technology in understanding nations and their interactions. Ultimately, though, both comparative history and transnational history rely on the nation as entity and conceptual category and therefore produce histories that complement rather than contest national histories. Also complementary are regional histories, whether of regions within nations (e.g., the study of *North East America* by Daniel Maudlin and Robin Peel[29]) or of supranational regions (e.g., the studies of Scandinavia in a work edited by one of this article's authors.[30]

Larger alternatives to the national paradigm include the growing fields of world history and global history. Design historical interventions in these categories include Victor Margolin's monumental *World History of Design*, which combines a chronological arrangement with regional and national perspectives, and the anthology, *Global Design History*, which originates from a

24 Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.

25 Samer Akkach, "Modernity and Design in the Arab World: Professional Identity and Social Responsibility," in *Design in the Borderlands,* eds. Eleni Kalantidou and Tony Fry (London: Routledge, 2014), 70.

26 See, for instance, Fernand Braudel, *On History,* trans. Sarah Matthews (1969; repr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

27 Greg Castilllo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

28 Ruth Oldenziel and Mikael Hård, *Consumers, Tinkerers, Rebels: The People Who Shaped Europe* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

29 Daniel Maudlin and Robert Peel, eds., *The Materials of Exchange Between Britain and North East America, 1750–1900* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013).

30 Kjetil Fallan, ed., *Scandinavian Design: Alternative Histories* (London: Berg Publishers, 2012).

museological perspective.[31] The textbook survey, *History of Design: Decorative Arts and Material Culture, 1400-2000,* also aims for global coverage (although with the exclusion of Australia/Oceania in the first edition).[32] Aligning the "material turn" in the humanities with the desire to move beyond the Western bias of most fields, Ruth Phillips argues that "[i]t is no accident that a concern with materiality has accompanied the rise of global consciousness and the reframing of curricula and research in 'world' terms—e.g., 'world' history, art history, literatures." Their congruence, she claims, is facilitated by the material turn's friendliness to "critical analysis of alternative sensory regimes."[33] World histories of design, then, are alluring because things lend themselves to cross-cultural translation and understanding. However, advocates of border studies, Tony Fry and Eleni Kalantidou, sound a warning about world history: "The plural nature of design cannot any longer be gathered and contained within any homogenising frame, notwithstanding for a 'world history of design' to be 'manufactured' within design history."[34] National studies may be too bounded by borders, but they are perhaps less prone to generalizing about the commonality of huge international regions than the project of world history.

Clearly, the historiography of recent decades demonstrates multiple challenges to the national framework in the writing of history, and alternative approaches abound. Notwithstanding these highly significant and influential developments in historical scholarship, the national paradigm is far from discarded; if anything, it is resurging. Stefan Berger has suggested as a catalyst for this renewed interest in national histories the political turmoil following the end of the cold war: "The nation is about to return to the historical stage, as it is still widely identified as the most powerful community of memory."[35] However, the new national histories are significantly different from the homogenizing, monolithic narratives so prominent in traditional historiography:

> Where the old national paradigms worked on the basis of "othering" and inclusion/exclusion mechanisms, the new histories have steadfastly opposed excluding certain stories in order to make the overall story a homogenous one. […] The historical master narrative needs to be pluralized in order to arrive at more tolerant and playful forms of cultural identity.[36]

National histories have been portrayed as outmoded and static; for example, François Hartog has raised the question: "How should we write national history without reactivating the patterns of nineteenth century historiography: that is to say, the close association of progress and the nation … or without presenting it as a paradise lost?"[37] Such worries seem predicated on an outmoded and static understanding of the nation itself as an analytical category. If the nation is instead conceived of as a dynamic,

31 Victor Margolin, *World History of Design,* 2 vols. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Adamson, Riello, and Teasley, *Global Design History.*

32 Pat Kirkham and Susan Weber, eds., *History of Design: Decorative Arts and Material Culture, 1400-2000* (New York: Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

33 Ruth B. Phillips, "Materiality and Cultural Translation: Indigenous Arts, Colonial Exchange, and Postcolonial Perspectives," in *Cultural Histories of the Material World,* ed. Peter N. Miller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 140.

34 Tony Fry and Eleni Kalantidou, "Design in the Borderlands: An Introduction," in *Design in the Borderlands,* eds. Eleni Kalantidou and Tony Fry (London: Routledge, 2014), 6; Tony Fry, "A Geography of Power: Design History and Marginality," *Design Issues* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1989): 15–30.

35 Berger, "A Return to the National Paradigm?," 673.

36 Ibid., 678.

37 François Hartog, "Time, History and the Writing of History: the Order of Time," in *History-Making: The Intellectual and Social Formation of a Discipline,* eds. Rolf Thorstendahl and Irmline Veit-Brause (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1996), 112.

Figure 2
Trilingual street sign in Brussels. Photograph:
Bharain Mac An Bhreithiún-Bertapelli.

38   Chris Lorenz, "Representations of
     Identity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, Gender
     and Religion. An Introduction to
     Conceptual History," in *The Contested
     Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and
     Gender in National Histories,* eds. Stefan
     Berger and Chris Lorenz (Basingstoke,
     UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 30.

39   Finn Arne Jørgensen, *Making a Green
     Machine: The Infrastructure of Beverage
     Container Recycling* (New Brunswick:
     Rutgers University Press, 2011).

40   Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei,
     "Introduction: The History of Italian
     Design," in *Made in Italy: Rethinking a
     Century of Italian Design,* eds. Grace
     Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (London:
     Bloomsbury, 2013), 6.

41   Viviana Narotzky, "Selling the Nation:
     Identity and Design in 1980s Catalonia,"
     Design Issues 25, no. 3 (Summer 2009);
     Anna Calvera, ed., *From Industry to Art:
     Shaping a Design Market through Luxury
     and Fine Crafts* (Barcelona 1714–1914).
     Essays on Local History (Barcelona: Gus-
     tavo Gili, 2013).

42   Wendy Kaplan, ed., *California Design
     1930–1965: Living in a Modern Way* (Los
     Angeles: LACMA; Cambridge, MA: MIT
     Press, 2011); Folke Edwards et al., *Tänk
     på saken: En bok om design i väst* [Think
     About It: A Book About Design in West-
     ern Sweden] (Göteborg: Nordbok, 2000).

43   See, e.g., Michael McMillan, *The Front
     Room: Migrant Aesthetics in the Home*
     (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009).

ever-evolving entity—as an "essentially contested concept"—side-stepping the trap described by Hartog seems possible.[38] We contend that the national framework—although, or perhaps because, it is contested—remains a vital and rewarding organizational concept in the writing of history.

Nations Within Nations

The contested state of the nation stems from within, as well as from without. If transnational design dialogues, international trade, and supranational policies call attention to the extrinsic complexities of national narratives, then conversely, a range of intra-national contexts serves to highlight their intrinsic complexities. Many, if not all, modern nation-states comprise ethnic, geographic, linguistic, cultural, and legal entities, the expanses of which often do not overlap with state borders. The disparate legislations of the states that make up the United States, for instance, can make or break efforts by companies designing products and systems intended to work seamlessly on a national (and international) scale.[39] The contested national-linguistic identities of many regions and cities, such as Brussels, are reflected in their material culture (see Figure 2).

In other instances, regional cultural identities—including design cultures—are so prevalent that they virtually overshadow the national ones. In Italy, *campanilismo*—hometown attachment—is still very much a force to be reckoned with, and regional diversity has greatly affected design history writing.[40] In Spain, the local and regional design cultures of Barcelona and Catalonia have at times seemed to usurp that of the nation.[41] Also, in countries as different as Sweden and the United States, the region has emerged as a unit of design historical analysis.[42]

As politically charged and ethically precarious as issues pertaining to some of these geographically defined sub-nations can be, the situation becomes more delicate still where ethnicity is concerned, although this complexity s rarely acknowledged by design historians. Despite the longstanding multi-ethnic make-up of nations like the United Kingdom and the United States and the centrality of design to diaspora cultures, diversity remains poorly reflected in their design histories.[43] The forging of ethnically inclusive national narratives becomes even more convoluted when considering indigenous "nations within nations," such as the "first nation" peoples of Canada, the Mayan peoples of Meso-America, or the Sami population in Scandinavia. In such cases, these populations sometimes even possess homelands that cut across national boundaries while being considered (state-less) nations in and of themselves. At the other end of the scale are dispersed peoples, such as Jews and Roma, whose material cultures are rarely articulated in national narratives, and only now are the relations between migration and design culture being

Figure 3
Installation view of the exhibition 'Italy: The New Domestic Landscape'. MoMA, NY, May 26, 1972 through September 11, 1972 Location: New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). DIGITAL IMAGE © 2015 The Museum of Modern Art/Scala, Florence.

examined.[44] These many intrinsic complexities of the contested entity that is the nation need to be explored and explicated in the writing of national design histories so that more inclusive and representative accounts of national design cultures can be constructed.

Transnational Design Histories

Just as we caution against rejecting the national in favor of the global, so also do we avoid advocating for the reverse—rejecting the global in favor of the national. Nations are not isolated entities; they engage in multidirectional dialogues with neighbors, friends, influencers, trading partners, and enemies. Given the importance of international liaisons, that so many academic studies are bound by national borders is both surprising and concerning. Designed spaces, objects, images, processes, and behaviors certainly are capable of communicating national identity; meanwhile, one characteristic of globalization is the wider exchange of people, ideas, goods, and services across national borders. Globalization thus calls us to produce internationally situated investigations in which national design histories are understood within international contexts. One route to this understanding is transnational design history.

To truly understand what, if anything, is distinctive about a nation, we must leave it, perceive it from a distance, appraise it from a conceptual Archimedean point. To illustrate, Italian design is a myth as much constructed in the design stores, magazines, and galleries of London, New York, Paris, and Sydney as in the design studios, factories, and small- to medium-sized businesses of Milan, Florence, Turin, or Rome.[45] This creation process has incorporated landmark exhibitions, including *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1972 (see Figure 3), as well as quotidian press coverage.

44 Henning Engelke and Tobias Hochscherf, eds., *Between Avant-Garde and Commercialism: Reconsidering Émigrés and Design,* special issue, Journal of Design History 18, no. 1 (2015).

45 Grace Lees-Maffei, "'Made' in England? The Mediation of Alessi S.p.A.," in *Made in Italy: Rethinking a Century of Italian Design,* eds. Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 287-303.

National studies clearly do not have to be written only from outside the nation in question or by foreigners. But design historians should more often undertake the greater work involved in transnational studies, supra-national regional studies, and/or comparative studies to better reflect the ways in which design is, and has been, conceived, produced, mediated, and consumed internationally.

The consumption and mediation in one place of goods, images, or ideas produced in another provides a rich seam for historians of design and culture to study.[46] When people move, they undergo a process of acculturation or "transculturation," as Fernando Ortiz called the process in relation to Cuba, in particular.[47] Ortiz's concept of transculturation can be applied to the movement of goods, images, and ideas that requires a process of acculturation on the part of producers, consumers, and mediators. In his monumental work of postcolonial theory, Edward Said has critiqued the transcultural practice of *Orientalism,* characterized as exoticized representations of a generalized middle and far "East."[48] Said's orientalism is literary, but designed objects also express orientalism, from the "Chinoiserie" of the eighteenth-century British potteries' willow pattern, inspired by Delft blue variations on Chinese ceramics, to the mid- to late-nineteenth century trend for *"Japonisme"* (see Figure 4).[49]

Also highly relevant for a transnational and/or transcultural design history is Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial notion of "hybridity" as a *dialogue* between colonizer and colonized, rather than a binarism and an inflexible relation of center and margin. More recently, a tendency to celebrate cultural hybridity as a form of transnational or multicultural communication has ceded to recognition that the nations engaged in producing hybridity are often participating in unequal power relations.[50]

46   Grace Lees-Maffei and Rebecca Houze, eds. *The Design History Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 465–510.

47   Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar,* trans. Harriet De Onís (1940; repr. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 98.

48   Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

49   See John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995), 127–9.

50   Marwan Kraidy, "Hybridity in Cultural Globalization," *Communication Theory* 12, no. 3 (2002): 317. See also Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity: or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

This inequality has been recognized, for example, in American studies, the notion of American exceptionalism has been discredited and all but discarded in favor of understanding the United States within the world, and global American studies. New currents in American studies exemplify what Janice Radway has termed "bifocal vision," which she describes as "a capacity to attend simultaneously to the local and the global *as* they are intricately intertwined" and "a relational and comparative perspective."[51]

Proceeding from the recognition that national identity cannot be understood solely from within a given focal nation, an argument can be made that transnational or comparative design histories are better fitted to understanding national identity in design and the transnational nature of design and its histories than the single-nation studies that have dominated design histories up to the present, despite efforts to globalize the field.

Globalized Nations

We live in an age of globalization. Globalization clearly has ramifications for the role of national frameworks and the experience of national identities. However, at the same time, "we live in a nationalised world. The concept of the nation is central to the dominant understandings of both political community and of personal identity."[52] The increased mobility of people, products, and information alike might be making the conceptual grid of nationality more complex than ever, but it is not eradicating it. According to Tim Edensor, "globalisation and national identity should not be conceived in binary terms but as two inextricably interlinked processes" because "as global cultural flows become more extensive, they facilitate the expansion of national identities and also provide cultural resources which can be domesticated, enfolded within popular and everyday national cultures."[53] Similarly, Anthony Smith has argued that, far from rendering nations, nationalism, and national identities obsolete, globalization reinforces and recasts their roles in contemporary society.[54] Writing history today, then, should be less about pitching the global against the local, regional, and national, and more a matter of exploring the interactions and influences between these different scales: "As each scale of observation and analysis is associated with specific cognitive benefits, the very principle of a variation of scales is more important than the choice of one single scale."[55]

So far, we have briefly reviewed the fall from dominance of the national paradigm, as well as a range of alternatives to it, to reach the current state of the art in the historiography of nations: We now recognize that the local, regional, national, and global operate in dynamic simultaneity. From this position, we can consider design and national identity.

51 Janice Radway, "What's in a Name? Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998," *American Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1999): 23–4.

52 Geoffrey Cubitt, "Introduction," in *Imagining Nations,* ed. Geoffrey Cubitt (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998), 1.

53 Edensor, *National Identity,* 29.

54 Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

55 Jacques Revel, "Multiple Narratives: Scale and Discontinuity in History," in *Unsettling History: Archiving and Narrating in Historiography,* eds. Sebastian Jobs and Alf Lüdtke (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2010), 59.

Figure 5

Wooden cross country skis made by Madshus Skifabrikk are here aestheticized almost beyond recognition through modernist product photography to resemble a Mondrian painting, at the time of receiving the Norwegian Design Center's Mark of Design Excellence in 1965. Image courtesy of the Norwegian Centre for Design and Architecture (CC-BY-NC-SA).
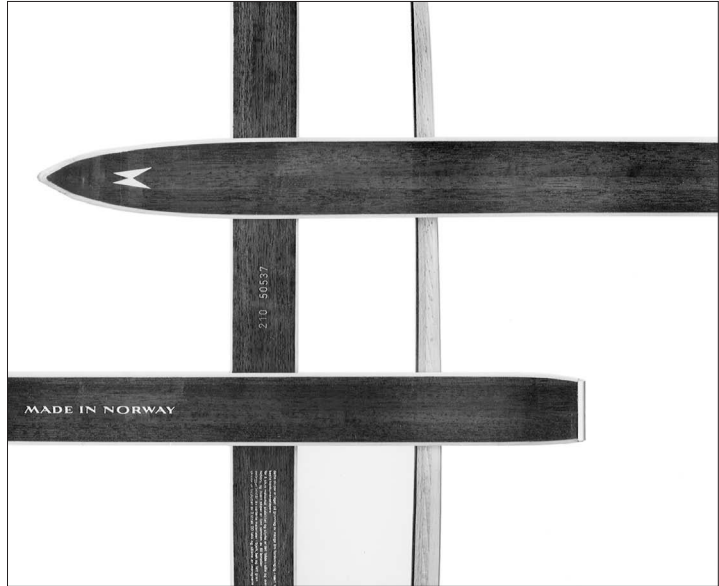
Design and National Identity

Constructivist approaches to national identity have incorporated design culture in their analyses to some extent, but largely in passing and rarely with much new insight into the meaning and role of designed artifacts. In calling for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of national narratives, Stefan Berger insists that scholars from across the arts and humanities "need to study fictional, artistic, musical, visual and historiographic representations of the national pasts alongside each other."[56] However, few studies to date have systematically incorporated design in such examinations. The material culture invoked in these studies has largely been restricted to that which can be said to have an explicitly symbolic function, such as flags, coinage, folk costumes, and monuments.[57] Calls for greater attention to less overtly nationalist material culture remain unheeded so that these cultural aspects remain underexplored.[58] Edensor's critique of the various works of Gellner, Anderson, Hobsbawm, Smith, and Hutchinson as useful but partial in their neglect of popular culture and of the scalar practices in everyday life is perhaps salient as a call for a greater design historical attention to national identity. In noting that "[t]he intimate relationships between people and the things they make (or used to make) become important signifiers of identity for national communities," Edensor recognizes that "mass manufactured commodities are associated with particular nations, also often carrying mythic associations that connote particular qualities and forms of expertise."[59] Traditional, wooden, cross-country skis are a good example: Although technologically obsolete, the skis today remain a symbol of national identity in the Norwegian popular imagination (see Figure 5).

56   Stefan Berger, "Narrating the Nation: Historiography and Other Genres," in *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media and the Arts,* eds. Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas and Andrew Mycock (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 10.
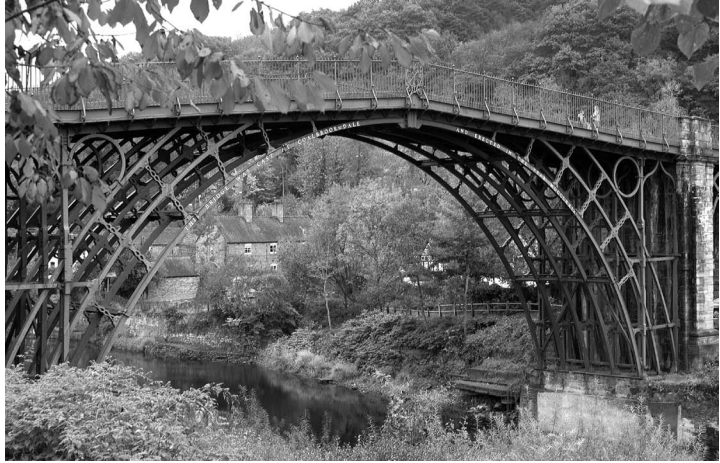
57   See, e.g., Billig, *Banal Nationalism.*

58   Andrew D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 77; Edensor, *National Identity*, 12.

59   Edensor, *National Identity,* 105.

Figure 6
The Iron Bridge, Ironbridge, England.
Photograph by Jason J. Smith.

Therefore, the relationship between design and national identity is extremely practical, concrete, and material, and it operates at the level of the public imaginary, of myth, and symbol: "In the face of globalisation, commonly shared things anchor people to place."[60] Not only are designers responsible for the regalia of state and monarchy, and the flags, currency, stamps, and other insignia of the public-facing nation; they also furnish our everyday surroundings with goods and services that are taken for granted and have been largely excluded from examinations of national identity to date. Yet, as historians increasingly engage with material culture, this regrettable lacuna is slowly being addressed.

In the introduction to his popular project, *A History of the World in 100 Objects,* Neil MacGregor emphasizes the role of designed artifacts in narrating national histories in a global context: "All round the world national and communal identities are increasingly being defined through new readings of their history, and that history is frequently anchored in things."[61] For example, in some former colonies that have experienced industrialization later, relative to Western nations, design has been considered an important way "for countries on the periphery to come to terms with modernity, with the modern project, and not only in the realm of industry, but also in that of social organization."[62] Since Gui Bonsiepe wrote these words nearly a generation ago, the notion of a periphery that implies a single center, has been challenged, and a model of multiple centers is now more accepted as a way of understanding cultural difference on a global scale.[63]

However, the intimate relations between design, designed goods, and national identity are equally prominent in what are often termed "post-industrial societies," where national industrial heritage and national design heritage become key identity markers. Examples abound in the United Kingdom, the first industrialized nation. The UNESCO World Heritage site at Ironbridge in England is home to ten museums commemorating the "birthplace of industry," including not just the Iron Bridge itself (see Figure 6),

60 Ibid., 116.

61 Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), xxv.

62 Gui Bonsiepe, "Developing Countries: Awareness of Design and the Peripheral Condition," in *History of Industrial Design: 1919-1990, vol. 3, The Dominion of Design,* ed. Carlo Pirovano (Milan: Electa, 1991), 252.

63 Calvera, "Local, Regional, National, Global and Feedback," 371–83; Yuko Kikuchi and Yunah Lee, "Transnational Modern Design Histories in East Asia: An Introduction," *Journal of Design History* 27, no. 4 (2014): 325.

Figure 7
Members of the Danish design collective Spring massacring Hans Wegner's iconic Y chair at Trapholt art museum, Kolding, Denmark, in 1995. Photo: Ole Frederiksen. Image courtesy of Polfoto.

64 "Ironbridge Gorge," UNESCO World Heritage Convention List, http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/371/ (accessed February 21, 2015).

65 Kjetil Fallan, "Kombi-Nation: Mini Bicycles as Moving Memories," *Journal of Design History* 26, no. 1, (2013): 81.

66 Claudia Bell, "Collectors as Guardians of National Artifacts," *Home Cultures* 10, no. 1 (2013): 43–62.

67 For the former, see Jeremy Aynsley, *Nationalism and Internationalism: Design in the 20th Century* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1993). For the latter, see Simon Jackson, "The 'Stump-Jumpers': National Identity and the Mythology of Australian Industrial Design in the Period 1930–1975," *Design Issues* 18, no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 14–23; and Simon Jackson, "Sacred Objects: Australian Design and National Celebrations," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 3 (2006): 249–55.

68 Fallan, *Scandinavian Design;* Lees-Maffei and Fallan, *Made in Italy.*

69 Lees-Maffei, "'Made' in England?," 287ff.

70 Daniel J. Huppatz, "Jean Prouvé's Maison Tropicale: The Poetics of the Colonial Object," *Design Issues* 26, no. 4 (Autumn 2010): 33.

but also the Coalport China Museum and the Coalbrookdale Iron Museum, among others. The site is considered to be particular, geographically bounded by the topography of the gorge, and of "outstanding universal value": "The Industrial Revolution had its 18th century roots in the Ironbridge Gorge and spread world-wide, leading to some of the most far-reaching changes in human history."[64]

Elsewhere, the influential design heritage of the Scandinavian region and its constitutive nations is subject to massive public interest and sustained negotiation. This sentiment can be said to have reached its iconoclastic apex when Spring, the Danish design collective, in an event on the occasion of their exhibition at Trapholt Art Museum, took a chainsaw to Hans Wegner's Y chair in opposition to the looming shadows of "modern classics" and their constraint on the "running room" of new generations of designers (see Figure 7). Kjetil Fallan has suggested elsewhere that "products clearly identified with national industrial heritage have become increasingly important identity markers in our time of 'liquid modernity,' and their capacity to convey and evoke memories of *temps perdu* is more significant than ever."[65] A good example is found in the remarkable popularity in contemporary New Zealand of collecting "kiwiana"—objects seen as emblematic of recent national history and cultural identity.[66]

However, design history has not only revealed how designed objects can function as national identity markers, but also has provided sharp criticism of the same phenomenon, challenging the celebratory myths surrounding stereotypical national design icons.[67] This essential anti-essentialist project has informed subsequent scholarship in the field, including Fallan's revisionist collection of essays on Scandinavian design and our joint work on Italian design.[68] In the latter, Lees-Maffei has pointed out that a tendency to privilege the acts of ideation and design, rather than the processes of manufacturing, mediation, and consumption, in determining provenance for goods persists, even in the light of widespread recognition of the global nature of contemporary design.[69] Critiques of the association of design and national identity and work in design history, which has supported reductive or overly programmatic instances of such associations, have been informed to a greater or lesser degree by postcolonialism. D.J. Huppatz has complained that "[w]hereas it is by now widely acknowledged that the histories of modernism and of colonialism are deeply entangled, design history has not properly explored this connection."[70] Yuko Kikuchi and Yunah Lee have been similarly critical of the extent to which what they characterize as "Euroamerican" design history has failed to integrate work from outside that region, such as the emerging scholarship on East Asian design history, and has failed to take account of design histories in languages other than

English.[71] The problems associated with languages in design history writing will not easily be solved without significantly better funding for bilingual publication, massively increased linguistic capacity among design historians, or perhaps a technical solution facilitating translations of a quality suitable for academic work. In the meantime, design historians can continue working on the more extensive coverage of design, variously defined, around the world, informed by the recognition of the effect of colonialism and post-colonialism alike:

> … the history of design is entangled with the history of colonialism, even if this appears to be deliberately avoided in most design history discourses. It was not just design in the colonial spaces that perpetuated or supported colonialism; design in the "metropoles" made use of a seemingly unlimited supply of raw materials, contributed to the rise of consumerism, and created demand for products that perpetuated the colonial system of exploitation of labour, extraction of raw materials, and environmental destruction.[72]

Much work in this direction remains to be done, and it is a promising project that should continue to yield rich results for understanding design. A recent example is Arden Stern's study of how the hand-painted store-front signs in Lusaka, Zambia "are visually linked to globally dominant design practices"; yet "their creators simultaneously imbue graphics of diverse geographic, historical, and cultural provenance with Zambian specificity" through a process of domestication.[73]

Conclusion
This article has considered the intellectual context for the present situation in which we argue that studies of the national and of national identity in design must now place their subject within the contexts of the local, regional, and global at once if they are to accurately reflect the processes by which design is produced, mediated, and consumed in our century. We have considered several methodological issues raised in this process and thereby reflected something of the diverse strategies available to design historians in working toward the goal of globalizing design history without negating the importance of the national in design.

71   Yuko Kikuchi, "Design Histories and Design Studies in East Asia: Part 1," *Journal of Design History* 24, no. 3 (2011): 273–82; Kikuchi and Lee, "Trans-national Modern Design Histories in East Asia," 323–34.

72   Helder Pereira and Coral Gillett, "Africa: Designing as Existence," in *Design in the Borderlands,* eds. Eleni Kalantidou and Tony Fry (London: Routledge, 2014), 113.

73   Arden Stern, "Domesticating the Global: Sign Writing and Visual Culture in Lusaka, Zambia," *Design and Culture* 6, no. 3 (2014): 406.